South Florida Initiative

$1.6 Million in FY 2000

NOAA is requesting a $1.6 million increase for a total request of $5.1 million in FY 2000, to conduct research, modeling, monitoring, and restoration activities essential to the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration (SFER) Initiative. The SFER is an integrated effort among federal, tribal, state and non governmental partners to halt the degradation of the South Florida ecosystem. NOAA will provide information critical to completion of inland restoration projects and evaluation of the downstream impacts of restoration activities on coastal resources.

Why is Restoration Important?

Degradation of the South Florida ecosystem threatens natural resources, economies and the people who depend on them. Over the past 50 years canals and changes in land use have altered the natural flow of freshwater that sustained the Everglades and created some of the most diverse and productive coastal habitats on earth.

There are many signs of ecosystem degradation in coastal areas - seagrass dieoffs, declining fisheries, increased algal blooms, declining water quality, dying mangrove forests, degraded coral reefs, contaminated groundwater, fish deformities and diseases. The ecosystem is now in jeopardy, threatening the communities and economies that depend on it.

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is the number one dive destination in the world.

The potential benefits of the restoration are enormous. South Florida's coastal areas are important habitats for commercial and recreational fisheries that add millions of dollars to the South Florida Economy each year. They also support an international tourism industry worth billions of dollars. For example, over 2.5 million people visit just the Florida Keys alone and contribute $3 billion to South Florida's economy every year. Two-thirds of these visitors participate in water based recreation, with the Florida Keys being the number one dive destination in the world. Over ninety percent of the visitors are concerned about protecting the South Florida environment.

What SFER efforts are Needed by NOAA in FY 2000?

The continuation of this successful interagency program is critical to restore the Everglades, Florida Bay and Florida Keys coral reefs. The goal is to restore and sustain the ecosystem's valuable functions that provide water and other services for agriculture and urban areas, and produce natural resources supporting jobs, communities and billion dollar economies. NOAA's FY 2000 budget request will provide funding for restoration efforts through two line offices:

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) - In FY2000, NMFS requests an increase of $600 thousand to help restore South Florida's living marine resources. The NMFS South Florida program provides data and information on the impacts of inland restoration efforts on these resources. Under the interagency effort, the NMFS component will help ensure the restoration of commercial and recreational fisheries, and the recovery of protected resources in the marine/estuarine habitats of South Florida. NMFS will provide research and monitoring on four primary areas: recovery of protected resources; modeling fishery dynamics; restoring essential fish habitat; and research in support of the Coral Reef Initiative. NMFS works with all constituent groups within South Florida with a major component of the program dedicated to public outreach and public involvement in restoration including support of research at minority academic institutions.

NOAA has played an important role in shaping South Florida restoration efforts. For example:

- In 1998 NOAA research showed that pesticides flowing from agricultural fields into Florida Bay sediments may be affecting lower levels of the marine food chain with possible impacts on valuable commercial fisheries. Increased funding in FY 2000 will support research on how to reduce the transport and impacts of these and other contaminants on fisheries and marine mammals as part of the overall restoration effort.

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NOAA Budget

National Ocean Service	FY1999 Enacted $ M	FY2000 Request $ M
Ocean Resources Conservation & Assessment		
(Ocean Assessment Program)	$0.9	$1.9
(Coastal Ocean Science)	$1.3	$1.3
National Marine Fisheries Service		
(Resource Information)	$1.3	$1.9
NOAA South Florida Initiative -- Total	**$3.5**	**$5.1**

- In 1997 and 1998 , research on the crash of valuable pink shrimp populations showed that changes in salinity of Florida Bay nursery areas may substantially affect pink shrimp reproduction. New funding in FY 2000 will continue this research and help use this information to design inland projects to restore fresh water flows and normal salinities to Florida Bay.

National Ocean Service (NOS) - NOS requests an increase of $1 million in FY2000 for:

1. Predicting Ecosystem Changes: NOS will continue to support research to provide information on the causes of change in coastal resources to better guide and evaluate inland restoration activities. Inland restoration activities will change water flow throughout South Florida to meet a variety of needs. These changes will have dramatic impacts on the quantity, quality and timing of water flow to South Florida's coastal areas. This research will improve our understanding and ability to predict the impacts of altered water delivery on coastal areas by linking changes in inland water flow to coastal circulation patterns, nutrient inputs, plankton blooms, fisheries and many other coastal components. The resulting models will be used to improve inland restoration plans, evaluate restoration options, predict and monitor outcomes.

NOAA has played an important role in shaping South Florida restoration efforts. For example, since 1997 research supported by NOAA on coastal circulation patterns, rainfall distribution, plankton blooms and nutrient inputs to Florida Bay has provided important information used by state and federal agencies to design inland and coastal restoration efforts. Continued funding in FY 2000 would expand this research to acquire and incorporate valuable new information on the flow of nutrients into coastal areas, the impact of contaminants, coastal circulation patters and the impacts of inland restoration efforts on Florida's coral reefs.

2. Coastal Monitoring: New funding will provide an integrated environmental quality monitoring program in the South Florida Marine Ecosystem to support planning of restoration actions and provide a feedback system to assess the success of the restoration efforts as coastal areas. NOAA will carry out this monitoring as a cooperative activity in partnership with federal, state and local environmental agencies as well as academic, environmental, and other organizations. New funds will support continuing long-term monitoring and evaluation of the status and trends in the condition of various elements of the South Florida Marine Ecosystem including Florida's coral reefs, eelgrasses, nutrients, contaminants, critical freshwater input, and human uses of coastal resources.

NOAA has played an important role in shaping South Florida restoration efforts. For example, since 1997 NOAA has produced a geographic information system (GIS) providing access to over 225 state, federal and nongovernmental coastal monitoring programs in South Florida, used this information with regional scientists and resource managers to design an integrated coastal monitoring program for the restoration effort, and begun partial implementation of the program to monitor long-term health of the Florida Keys coral reefs. New funding in FY 2000 will allow the coastal monitoring program to be implemented providing essential information on the impacts of inland restoration efforts on Florida's coral reefs and other coastal resources.

NOAA's role in the SFER

NOAA supports the only portion of the SFER effort exclusively devoted to protecting and restoring the coastal and marine areas of the South Florida ecosystem. With information from NOAA, changes will be made in system of canals and pumps that control water flow to the Everglades and Florida's coastal areas. NOAA's research and monitoring is essential to design, predict and evaluate these changes and help restore Florida's degraded coastal areas such as the Everglades, Florida Bay and the Florida Keys coral reefs.

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